

Washington, DC - Congressman Steve King released the following statement today regarding yesterday's announcement by the Secretary of Agriculture that he plans to approve the closure of 131 Farm Service Agency offices across the country within 90 days. Three of the affected offices are in Iowa. The criteria for office closures were based on the number of employees the offices had on the payroll in mid-December of 2011. Any office that had two or less employees and was 20 miles or less from another office has been slated for closure. Last year, when the proposal was developed, the Iowa FSA system was under a hiring freeze due to budget issues and therefore offices that had retiring employees experienced lower than normal staffing numbers. This affected the three county offices in Iowa that are set to close. King believes that all government agencies should strive to be more efficient but about the USDA's current proposal to close offices without analyzing their workloads.

"One has to question the rationale used by the USDA in pursuing these FSA office closures because it does not take into consideration the actual FSA workload in the affected counties," said King. "Historically we have had a tool to determine the workload in each county office based on the programs offered and the number of participants in those programs. I suspect an analysis of the workloads of these offices would justify keeping them open."

"It's also important to note that the FSA offices in Iowa that are slated for closure by Secretary Vilsack are located in counties that have a large number of acres in CRP. Over several decades, this has led to a loss of population, a loss of farmers and shrinkage of our small towns. This proposal will only make things worse for small town and rural Iowa. Soon these counties will begin to see more and more acres come out of CRP. There's no question they'll be hurt by the lack of local FSA offices to help support revitalization of their land and communities. How much of this can small town and rural Iowa withstand? I call upon Secretary Vilsack to reconsider this decision."

###